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CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

69. (currently amended) An auction method comprising the following steps: providing either a guarantee for a transaction involving a first entity or a bond to said first entity; providing a mechanism whereby a second entity can file a claim for coverage under said guarantee or said bond; receiving payment from a third entity for an advertisement so as to offset at least a portion of the cost of said guarantee or said bond; conducting an auction; and indicating the existence of said guarantee or said bond when said first entity is a participant in said first auction.

70. (currently amended) A method of providing bond or guarantee coverage in relation to an online auction, said method comprising the following steps: receiving information pertaining to a first entity; and guaranteeing a transaction or bonding said first entity for a first period of time, wherein the end of said first period is determined by reference to a first moment in time, said first moment in time being when a first auction begins or ends.

71. (currently amended) The method in claim 70 wherein said first period of time comprises a second period of time, said second period of time being a time period during which a claim can be filed.

72. (currently amended) The method in claim 71
additionally comprising the following step:
releasing collateral after said first period of time or said
second period of time ends.

73. (currently amended) The method in claim 70
additionally comprising the following step:
allowing submission of a claim only after a third period of
time has elapsed, said third period of time comprising a
delivery period.

74. (currently amended) The method in claim 70
additionally comprising the following step:
automatically renewing a first bond or first guarantee only
if a charge to a first account is successful.

75. (currently amended) An auction method comprising the
following steps:
prior to closing of a first online auction, receiving a
first application from a first entity, said first
application comprising payment or credit information;
opening or verifying a first account related to said first
entity; and
upon closing of said first online auction, immediately
charging said first account when said first entity is a
winning bidder in said first auction.

76. (currently amended) The method in claim 75
additionally comprising at least one step selected from the
group consisting of:
obtaining collateral from said first entity in relation to
said first account; or

displaying a first image on a computer network evidencing that said first entity has opened said first account.

77. (currently amended) The method in claim 75 additionally comprising at least one step selected from the group consisting of:

providing a mechanism through which a first seller can provide a discount when a first bidder has opened an account or has obtained a bond; and/or
providing a mechanism through which a first seller can reject a first bid when said first bidder has not opened an account or has not obtained a bond.

78. (currently amended) The online method described in claim 1, wherein said unique identifier comprises a community self-policing mechanism, said community self-policing mechanism further comprising a hyperlink to a first document under the exclusive control of a third entity, said hyperlink thereby providing a mechanism for authenticating the information displayed in said unique identifier.

79. (currently amended) The online method as described in claim 1 wherein said unique identifier comprises an image that is hosted on the server of a third entity such that, if bond or guaranty coverage pertaining to said first entity becomes invalid, said image can be altered by said third entity.

80. (currently amended) The online method as described in claim 1, wherein said unique identifier comprises a first indicator, said first indicator being selected from the group consisting of:

an Internet auction number;
a name associated with said first entity; or
a gauge of how much bond or guaranty coverage is available
with respect to a first Internet auction or said first
entity.

81. (currently amended) A method for reducing the risk of
default by Internet auction users, said method comprising
the following steps:

(a) providing a bond or guaranty which is in effect
with respect to a first Internet auction, said bond or
guaranty providing that, if a first Internet auction
user defaults, a second Internet auction user may be
contractually entitled to compensation from a third
party; and

(b) displaying a first link in a first document,
wherein:

said first document is located at a first URL and
comprises information pertaining to said first Internet
auction; and

said first link links to a second document, said second
document being located at a second URL and evidencing
that said bond or guaranty is in effect with respect to
said first Internet auction, said second document being
under the control of said third party.

82. (currently amended) The method in claim 81 additionally
comprising at least one step selected from the group
consisting of:

(c) providing a community self-policing mechanism, said
mechanism comprising a second link, said second link
serving to enable an auction community member to report

to said third party false representations regarding an Internet auction bond or guaranty;

(d) providing a third document located at a third URL wherein said third document comprises an electronic means whereby said second Internet auction user can submit information to said third party regarding the default of said first Internet auction user and thereby assert a contractual right to compensation by said third party;

(e) referring to a database containing at least one record pertaining to the past conduct of said first Internet auction user in order to evaluate whether said first Internet auction user is worthy of a bond or guaranty;

(f) receiving a deposit or a source of funds from said first Internet auction user prior to the closure of said first Internet auction; and/or

(g) assessing whether said first Internet auction user's account or accounts with said third party are in good standing in order to evaluate whether said first Internet auction user is worthy of a bond or guaranty.